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Baseball Beginnings

Considering the present popularity of baseball, it is difficult to realize that the sport has developed almost entirely since the Civil War. Before that time there were sporadic attempts to arouse interest in baseball but it was not until the soldiers, who learned the game while in army camps, returned to their homes that the sport became a national pastime.

During the year 1866, clubs were organized in towns and cities throughout the country and records exist of a few ball teams in Iowa in that year. By 1867 the baseball fever had spread and new teams were formed which contended for supremacy with neighboring clubs.

Typical of the baseball clubs organized sixty years ago was the one in Cedar Rapids, then a thriving town of about three thousand inhabitants. This club was formed by a group of young men who met

for the purpose at the office of the Farmers' Insurance Company on the evening of May 2, 1867. A constitution was adopted which, with a few modifications to fit the local situation, followed a model constitution that had been drafted in the previous December by the National Association of Base Ball Players at their meeting in New York. This association, it should be mentioned, had been formed in 1858, and after the Civil War was evidently engaged in promoting the organization of baseball clubs throughout the country.

The Cedar Rapids players decided to style their organization the "Cedar Rapids Base Ball Club". They elected officers including a president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer, and three directors. The president elected at the first meeting was E. S. Hill, secretary of the Farmers' Insurance Company, at that time one of the large insurance companies of the State.

A few days later, the weekly *Cedar Valley Times*, edited by Dr. F. McClelland, announced that the "organization is now perfected and in full operation. The time of meeting for practice is Tuesday and Saturday of each week, at 4 P. M. This is an admirable opportunity for 'developing the muscle', and all our young men of sedentary habits should embrace it."

It was not until June 21st that the Cedar Rapids Base Ball Club played its first "matched game", the opponent on that occasion being the Oatka Base

Ball Club of Vinton. In calling attention to this game which was to be played on the grounds of the Cedar Rapids Club on Eagle Street (now Second Avenue), the *Times* said, "Those who want to enjoy a season of fun and scenes of dexterity, will not fail to be present on this occasion."

The game was played as scheduled but, probably due to the inexperience of both teams, the score was comparatively low. Cedar Rapids made only thirty-seven "tallies" while Vinton could score but fourteen. In those days the total score of a game not uncommonly exceeded a hundred runs. On October 17, 1867, for example, Mount Pleasant beat Burlington one hundred and fifteen to forty-two!

Two scorers, one representing each club, kept the record of the game. The box score showed the lineup and the record of each team as follows:

Oatka Club of Vinton

	<i>Outs</i>	<i>Runs</i>
Pickerill, catcher	5	0
Ross, pitcher	2	2
Weed, short-stop	5	0
McLucas, first base	2	2
Shields, second base	3	1
Steadman, third base	3	2
Sterling, left field	1	4
Griffeth, center field	2	3
North, right field	4	0
	<hr/> 27	<hr/> 14

Cedar Rapids Club

	<i>Outs</i>	<i>Runs</i>
C. Morehead, catcher	2	7
Hancock, pitcher	3	4
Stewart, short-stop	2	5
Hill, first base	4	3
Thompson, second base	3	3
Greene, third base	2	4
Ayers, left field	2	4
H. C. Morehead, center field	3	5
Howlett, right field	6	2
	<hr/> 27	<hr/> 37

After reading the "jazzed" accounts of present-day sport writers, the comment on this game which appeared in the *Cedar Valley Times*, June 27, 1867, seems naïve. "The Cedar Rapids boys," said the writer, "acquitted themselves nobly, playing with an earnestness and vim and meeting with a success truly encouraging and decidedly flattering to them, as players, considering the shortness of the time since the organization of the club and the little practice they have had. The Vinton boys played well, but fate was against them from the start, and the first three or four innings demonstrated the result. Taken as a whole, this was a very pleasant affair, all parties conducting themselves in a most gentlemanly manner; a true spirit of fairness and courtesy characterizing the entire proceedings." In those days friendly sportsmanship seems to have

been regarded as highly as skill in playing. The spirit of professionalism had not yet developed.

In view of the frequency with which umpires of this day are showered with pop bottles and threatened with mob action, it is interesting to read that E. A. Allen, captain of the "Grove City" Base Ball Club at Marion, who umpired the game, received "the thanks expressed in three rousing cheers of both clubs for the able, efficient and impartial manner in which he discharged the duties of umpire on the occasion."

The result of the next game was not so pleasing to the Cedar Rapids team for, on June 28, 1867, the "Grove City" Club of Marion defeated them by a score of fifty-two to twenty-six. But, said the *Times*, "The most perfect harmony and good feeling existed during the game, and the Cedar Rapids boys take their defeat philosophically. The only reason we hear given for the great difference is, that the Marion boys did the best playing."

No further games were recorded until July 24th, when the Cedar Rapids Club journeyed to Vinton for a "return matched game of base ball" with the Oatka Club. On this occasion the Vinton team gained revenge for its earlier defeat for when the last "out" had been made, the box score showed that the Oatkas had thirty-eight runs while Cedar Rapids had only twenty-nine.

While the Cedar Rapids boys were "vanquished" they were not "discomfited". As a mark of their

sportsmanship they adopted a resolution, on their return to Cedar Rapids, thanking the members of the Oatka Club for their "liberal hospitality" and declaring that "to them belongs the honor of a double victory, won by superior skill on the field and by an exhibition of those qualities which constitute perfect gentlemen." Copies of the resolution were sent to the Oatka Club, the *Vinton Eagle*, and the *Cedar Valley Times*.

As it was difficult to secure outside competitors, the members of the Cedar Rapids Club provided diversion for themselves and amusement for the whole population of the town by two games between the married men and the single men of the club. The first game, played on August 16th, resulted in an overwhelming defeat for the married men. The final score was sixty-two to twenty-eight. The single men made thirty-four runs in the last inning. In an account of the game, headed "Alas Poor Benedicts", the *Times* humorously remarked, "We can account for this great difference only upon the theory that the game lasting until late, the benedicts were depressed in spirit in anticipation of the greetings they would receive from their worthy spouses for keeping supper waiting so long."

But a few days later the benedicts turned the tables on their rivals and achieved a sixty-one to thirty-one victory. This fact the *Times* recorded under the heading "Alas Poor Bachelors", and, in a facetious vein, offered the explanation that, "In-

spired either by the chagrin of their late defeat or urged on to victory by the taunts and jeers of the more energetic and aspiring partners of their bed and board, the benedicts hastened to remove the blemish which darkened their fair fame and disturbed the quiet of their households."

During the remainder of the 1867 season, only two other games were played by the Cedar Rapids Club, both with an organization styled the "Valley City Club". The first game, on September 2nd, was a victory for the Cedar Rapids Club by a score of fifty-one to forty-one, while the second game, played four days later, had a similar result, the Valley City Club going down to defeat forty-four to thirty-two.

Though a State baseball tournament at Belle Plaine was announced for September 10-13, 1867, the Cedar Rapids Club did not attend. Nor did the club participate in the State baseball tournament at Burlington, on October 15-17, 1867, where the Mount Pleasant Hawk-Eyes won the championship by overwhelming scores.

Not only is the Cedar Rapids Base Ball Club of interest because it was the first organization of its kind in the city, but it is worthy of consideration because of its personnel. Many of the players were members of the best families in Cedar Rapids and most of them were active in the business life of the city.

E. S. Hill, the first baseman and the president of the club, has been mentioned as holding the position

of Secretary of the Farmers' Insurance Company. E. M. Greene, who played third base or did the catching, was a son of Judge George Greene, the noted railroad builder, and half brother of C. G. Greene, at present one of the most respected citizens of Cedar Rapids. Mr. Greene was engaged in the real estate business but later moved to St. Louis to serve as Secretary of the St. Louis, Hannibal and Keokuk Rail Road, with which his father and other Cedar Rapids men were prominently connected.

L. M. Ayers, who played left field, was a member of the firm which published the *Cedar Valley Times* and for some time afterward the *Cedar Rapids Times* during the period these papers were edited by Dr. F. McClelland. For many years he was chief of the Cedar Rapids Fire Department and, more than any one else, deserves the credit for organizing fire fighting in the city.

G. M. Howlett, who played right field and second base on the team, was shortly afterwards appointed postmaster of Cedar Rapids. H. C. Morehead, center fielder, was a dealer in tinware, hardware, and stoves. His kinsman, C. Morehead, the catcher, was a tinner by trade.

William B. Stewart, the first team short-stop, was employed by a business firm on Commercial Street (now First Street) which was then the center of the business district. He was the city recorder while W. B. Leach was serving as mayor. In 1870, Mr. Stewart entered the railway mail service and moved

from the city. His son, Charles B. Stewart, is now engaged in business in Cedar Rapids.

Other members of the first team were A. G. Hancock, pitcher, and W. A. Thompson, second baseman. Another member of the club, not on the first team, whose name is known, was Samuel Neidig, a wholesale and retail grocer whose place of business was on South Commercial Street. He is now living in Des Moines. Charles Weare and Ely E. Weare were, at the time, employed as clerks. They were the sons of John Weare, the banker, who with Judge Greene had started the first bank in Cedar Rapids in 1851. A few years after the organization of the baseball club, Charles Weare became the postmaster of Cedar Rapids. The two Weares were brothers of Mrs. W. W. Walker, one of the much revered residents of Cedar Rapids at the present time.

L. L. Cone, the treasurer of the club, was a member of an old Marion family and is still remembered as an excellent bookkeeper. During the seventies he was employed by the Union Savings Bank of which Judge Greene was the president. Others listed were William Weeks, a carpenter; Lyman Gleason, an employee of the Farmers' Insurance Company; A. J. Mallahan, foreman of the job-printing department of the *Times* office; G. A. Gault; J. K. Wagoner; R. H. Whitenack; Harry Ward; George Carroll, vice-president of the club; and John Van Meter, the secretary.

These twenty men were the pioneers of Cedar

Rapids baseball. They made the sport popular in their own locality, just as similar clubs were popularizing baseball in towns and cities all over the United States. From such beginnings sixty years ago our most distinctive national pastime has developed.

ERIK MCKINLEY ERIKSSON